

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An information processing apparatus for studying a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising:

5 request means for requesting a first inspector to study the target case; and

detection means for detecting access to a database relating to the target case by the first inspector.

10 2. The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

report means for reporting a detection result obtained by said detection means to a requester who has requested the first inspector to study the case.

15 3. The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said report means checks an access state by the first inspector at predetermined time intervals, and issues a predetermined reminder when no access is  
20 detected a predetermined time after the request.

4. The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

25 suspension means for suspending a request from a requester who has requested the first inspector to study the case at an instruction of the requester.

5. The apparatus according to claim 4, further comprising:

re-request means for requesting a second inspector different from the first inspector at an inspection of the requester to accept a request of a requester who has requested the first inspector to study the case.

6. An information processing method for studying a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising the steps of:

requesting a first inspector to study the target case; and

detecting access to a database relating to the target case by the first inspector.

7. An program storage medium storing a program for realizing an information processing method for studying a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising:

a code for requesting a first inspector to study the target case; and

a code for detecting access to a database relating to the target case by the first inspector.

8. An information processing apparatus for studying a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising:

a table relating to organization information; and  
management means for selectively performing by  
referring to said table a first study management mode  
in which the target case is studied through a  
5 predetermined path, and a second study management mode  
in which an inspector who inspects the target case  
sequentially requests a subsequent inspector to study  
the case.

10 9. The apparatus according to claim 8, wherein  
said table relating to the organization  
information indicates a hierarchical management  
structure in a company.

15 10. The apparatus according to claim 8, further  
comprising:

a study path pattern table storing a plurality of  
patterns of study paths for the first study management  
mode.

20 11. The apparatus according to claim 8, wherein  
in the second study management mode, a request for  
study is issued by specifying a name of an inspector  
without using said table relating to the organization  
25 information.

12. An information processing method for studying

a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising the steps of:

referring to a table relating to organization information; and

5 performing a managing step by selectively performing based on said referring step a first study management mode in which the target case is studied through a predetermined path, and a second study management mode in which an inspector who inspects the  
10 target case sequentially requests a subsequent inspector to study the case.

13. A program storage medium storing a program for realizing an information processing method for  
15 studying a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising:

a code for referring to a table relating to organization information; and

a code for realizing a managing step by  
20 selectively performing based on said referring process a first study management mode in which the target case is studied through a predetermined path, and a second study management mode in which an inspector who inspects the target case sequentially requests a  
25 subsequent inspector to study the case.

14. An information processing apparatus for

generating a document relating to a patent application  
by communicating information through a network,  
comprising:

association means for dividing a patent  
5 application procedure into a plurality of steps, and  
associating a reference document used in generating a  
document in step units with a due date of generation of  
the document; and

management means for managing generation of the  
10 document.

15. The apparatus according to claim 14, wherein  
said plurality of steps contain an application and  
a rejection reason response.

16. The apparatus according to claim 14, wherein  
said management means manages generation of the  
document by making links to a management database for  
item management and a document database for document  
20 management.

17. The apparatus according to claim 14, wherein  
said management means manages generation of the  
document by defining a virtual file in a network.

25 18. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein  
a timing of generating a file is defined in said

step units relating to the virtual file.

19. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein  
a process performed when a file is generated is  
5 defined in said step units relating the virtual file.

20. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein  
a timing of extinguishing a file is defined in  
said step units relating to the virtual file.

10 21. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein  
a process performed when a file is extinguished is  
defined in said step units relating the virtual file.

15 22. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein  
a related document is defined in said step units  
relating to the virtual file.

20 23. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein  
a study and approval path is defined in said step  
units relating to the virtual file.

24. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein  
said virtual file can be copied, and  
25 simultaneously distributed through a network using a  
plurality of paths.

25. An information processing method for generating a document relating to a patent application by communicating information through a network, comprising the steps of:

5       dividing a patent application procedure into a plurality of steps, and associating a reference document used in generating a document in step units with a due date of generation of the document; and  
10       managing generation of the document.

26. A program storage medium storing a program for realizing an information processing method for generating a document relating to a patent application by communicating information through a network,  
15       comprising the steps of:

20       a code for dividing a patent application procedure into a plurality of steps, and associating a reference document used in generating a document in step units with a due date of generation of the document; and  
25       a code for realizing a managing step of managing generation of the document.

SUB B17 27. An information processing apparatus for accumulating technical documents relating to a patent application, comprising:

accumulation means for accumulating a related technical document including a corresponding foreign

application for the patent application; and  
display control means for displaying a list of  
technical documents of a patent application accumulated  
in said accumulation means.

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28. The information processing apparatus  
according to claim 27, wherein

said display control means displays a flag  
indicating whether or not a prior art disclosure  
10 procedure has been performed on the technical document.

29. The information processing apparatus  
according to claim 27, wherein

said display control means displays descriptions  
15 indicating correspondence between the technical  
document and a rejection reason.

30. The information processing apparatus  
according to claim 27, wherein

said display control means displays a list of  
20 applications by which the technical document has been  
cited relating to the technical document.

31. An information processing method for  
25 accumulating technical documents relating to a patent  
application, comprising the steps of:

accumulating a related technical document



including a corresponding foreign application for the patent application; and

displaying and controlling a list of technical documents of a patent application accumulated in said accumulation step.

32. A program storage medium storing a program for realizing an information processing method for accumulating technical documents relating to a patent application, comprising the steps of:

a code for realizing an accumulation step of accumulating a related technical document including a corresponding foreign application for the patent application; and

a code for realizing a displaying and controlling step of displaying a list of technical documents of a patent application accumulated in said accumulation step.